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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 007232

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN "PEACE CAMP" FOCUSES ON POSITIVE ASPECTS OF "GENEVA ACCORD"

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Members of Jordan's disparate "peace camp" say that the unofficial "Geneva Accord" has not gotten the attention it deserves from U.S. and Arab leaders and hope that European support for continued talks will generate momentum to restart substantive negotiations. MFA officials describe the accord as a serious and important effort, but say the negotiators' failure to "market" the plan at the outset damaged its potential impact and gave the oppositionists, particularly in Israel, the upper hand. The GOJ is trying to convince a disillusioned public that Jordan remains engaged in the conflict, at a time when many Jordanians believe -- and fear -- that the United States is withdrawing from the peace process. The GOJ is struggling to come up with fresh ideas to move the process forward. End Summary.

JORDANIAN "PEACE CAMP" HIGHLIGHTS MERITS OF GENEVA ACCORD

2. (C) Members of Jordan's disparate and largely muted "peace camp" believe that the unofficial "Geneva Accord" -- announced on October 13 after meetings at a Jordanian Dead Sea resort -- merits consideration as a viable platform to reinvigorate debate about a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jordan University professor Mohammad Khair Mustafa says the accord complements the roadmap and should not be considered its replacement, and Fatah member Ghazi al-Saadi points to the accord's positive reception in Egypt and European capitals as evidence of its merit.

3. (C) Dr. Ibrahim Badran, chair of the international relations Department at Jordan's Philadelphia University, says the accord demonstrates that there are people on both sides willing to talk. He said that proper "marketing" of its controversial parts, such as the Palestinians' "right of return," could win over potential critics, particularly in the refugee community. According to Dr. Maher Waked of the Amman Center for Peace and Development, negotiations for a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip -- even unofficial -- helps allay fears among Jordanians that the current Israeli government is quietly committed to the idea of "transferring" Palestinians to Jordan.

4. (C) Highlighting European support for the agreement, Dr. Badran said that public and official U.S. and Arab expressions of support for the negotiations would go a long way to revitalize the stymied peace movements in both Israel and the Arab world. Dr. Mustafa said that Jordanians barely noticed the minimal press coverage of the accord, but those who did so see Sharon's vehement attacks against the accord as evidence that the agreement must be a good thing.

MFA OFFICIALS CRITICIZE POOR "MARKETING" OF THE ACCORD

5. (C) The MFA publicly denied any involvement in the Dead Sea meetings and officials there told us that their role was limited to hosting the meetings and observing the sessions. They criticized the negotiators for not securing outside support for the plan before it was announced. Foreign Minister Muasher, who attended some of the meetings, told the Ambassador that none of the regional states, including Jordan, had been consulted about the substance of the agreement despite their inherent interest in certain issues, particularly borders and refugees. He criticized the failure of the negotiators to brief potential supporters of the effort -- including U.S. officials -- before the accord was publicized on October 13. He said the negotiators had lost an opportunity to generate positive public feedback, and instead gave the opposition, particularly in Israel, an opportunity to fill the vacuum.

MEANWHILE, GOJ TOUTS ITS INVOLVEMENT TO A SKEPTICAL PUBLIC

6. (C) At the same time, Jordanian officials are trying to

convince a disillusioned public that it remains productively engaged in the peace process. During his first press conference since his reappointment to Fayez's cabinet, Foreign Minister Muasher on October 28 announced that the King's visit to Washington in December will focus specifically on "helping the Palestinians find a way out of the crisis." He termed the roadmap as the "only alternative" for peace, and said Jordan will receive a Palestinian delegation in Amman in the next few days to discuss the moribund peace process in advance of the King's trip. He berated Israel's "insecure wall," saying that it threatens the viability of a future Palestinian state. Following on the King's meeting with Palestinian PM Ahmad Qureia in Aqaba on October 23, MFA official Ashraf Zeitoon confirmed to Poloff that the GOJ will host a lower level Palestinian delegation in the next few days, with the aim of projecting the appearance of engagement and activity.

COMMENT

17. (C) Jordanians -- in and out of the government -- are concerned by evidence of U.S. disengagement from the peace process, and are grasping at any positive alternatives that present themselves. So, even if the text of the accord is largely irrelevant to the diplomatic process, it is likely to continue to gain modest attention in Jordan, including from a government that feels highly exposed any time the peace process is in peril.

GNEHM